

PROPERTY PLANNING COMMON ELEMENTS

COMPONENTS OF MASTER PLANS

HABITATS AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

Farming Practices

Description

Farming practices include rotational row cropping and establishment of food plots and dove fields (haying and grazing, also considered farming practices, are covered in separate Practices pages). These practices are used on DNR lands primarily to manipulate vegetation composition and structure, provide food sources for wildlife, and provide recreational opportunities for property users. Parcels may be farmed for several years before being restored to a permanent cover type or farmed on a longer-term basis, depending on the management objective. Common crops include corn, oats, winter wheat, soybeans, alfalfa, and sunflowers.

Rotational cropping can be a cost-effective way of reducing or eliminating woody encroachment or invasion by non-native invasive species on a parcel while it awaits restoration to a native cover type. A typical row-cropping rotation would include corn followed by soybeans or another legume. Often, a portion of the corn is left unharvested for wildlife winter forage. When converting a row-cropped site to permanent cover, grass or trees are planted after the soybean rotation. Oats are commonly used as a cover crop to aid in weed control during the transition. The field is then typically mowed 1-2 times for the first two years to control weeds until the permanent cover is established.

Food plots are established to provide wildlife forage and hunting opportunity, and may be installed at the property manager's discretion, as consistent with the property master plan and based on local needs. Food plots should be at least 1 acre in size and located adjacent to permanent cover. Dove fields are a specific type of food plot intended to attract mourning doves for hunting. As this is a concentrated form of hunting, property managers should carefully assess whether a particular property is suitable for locating a dove hunting field. Suitable characteristics include: agricultural landscape; upland location large enough to support dove fields in the interior of the property, away from buildings to avoid potential conflicts with neighbors; existing crop fields or grasslands that could be managed with a crop-grass rotation; within a ~2-hour drive of population centers; and good access, both for users and for potential sharecroppers. Dove fields typically are between 3 and 10 acres in size and planted to sunflowers.

Crops are established through farming agreements, following the policies and procedures described in the DNR Farming Agreements Program Guidance.

